

Gamification in Libraries: It's Importance and Current and Future Effects

By Julian Della Puppa

University of Southern California

Abstract

Libraries have entered a new phase in their life cycle in which they are no longer simply spaces that act as repositories of information. At times it is possible that they act as third spaces of life, that intertwine education, personal development, and can even provide some kind of social service help. As a way to harness the power that a library has at being a multifaceted user space that can fulfill the needs of a community, there are libraries that are using gamification, or the ability to use games, and/or game concepts to aid their local community into advancing their skills and promoting education in a new way. This paper will examine why gamification is important to libraries, how it is affecting libraries currently and for the future.

Keywords: gamification, library gamification

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Libraries play an important role in communities as at times they act as a resource for patrons that allows them to access newer technologies and materials. Recently they have been turning into makerspaces, encouraging community engagement. Part of this change to be a more interactive third space by using gamification. Gamification is a way for libraries to remain relevant, useful, and as part of people's lives by encouraging learning and development. Felker (2014) explains gamification as the way in which games, or game development ideas can be used to create interactive learning experiences that can have a meaningful impact on the user. This paper will examine why gamification is important to libraries, how gamification is affecting libraries currently and how it will affect libraries in the future. This will be done by using a number of sources which examine the relationship between gamification and libraries that support the idea that gamification is expanding library services and creating a positive developmental outcome for the communities they serve.

Literature Review

Felker (2014) in his article that overviews how gamification can be used in libraries explains how gamification and games are effective at drawing in patrons. He begins by pointing out how the games industry has an incredibly large user base, one that stems in the millions, and that while libraries may not be able to have the same user range as the games industry, but even being able to tap into a fraction of that base and having it use and access the library would be beneficial to libraries. Thus, taking elements from the gaming industry and understanding how to use games as a method to engage with patrons would ultimately be an important factor in ensuring that libraries can expand their user base as well as their services. (pp. 20) We see this with the way in which libraries have applied gamification aspects to certain basic events such as

a library orientation and turning them into a library scavenger hunt for students. A more advanced form of this was the New York Public Library having a project known as “Find the Future”, where patrons participated in mobile scavenger hunt that took place in the library overnight. This appeared to be well received and engaged patrons to learn in a new and creative way. (Farkas, 2014, pp.26)

Gamification is currently and mainly being applied for innovative learning for students. Universities are applying gamification ideas to the libraries that are on campus. Danforth (2011) states that, “Librarians are giving it a go with projects like BiblioBouts (bibliobouts.org), through which students compete to collect database resources, strengthening their information literacy skills while enjoying online games...”(pp.84) An other example of libraries examining there service and being useful for learning especially with students is how the UC system has used gamification to encourage its student patrons to interact and use the library. They have a point-based system that is increased when students use the library during the orientation (Price, 2013, pp. 165-166). Therefore, gamification is taking certain dull aspects of engaging with the library and transforming it into a program that actually teaches students and gets them to learn more about libraries.

Other ways in which gamification can be applied to aid users in a positive way is to incorporate the gaming concept of identity assumption. If there are users who struggle to use the libraries database, it can be beneficial during the instructional period to have them think and take on the role of a researcher. Thus, having them start to think on what terms or concepts they would need to use to find the items they are looking for. (Becker, 2013) Libraries also provide reading programs as a way to benefit the communities they are in and those too can apply elements of gamification, such as having prizes, built in metrics, and even having a sense of

competition. This is meant to engage users and help them increase their reading while also making it enjoyable. By applying this concept to the reading program, it can help those in the program want to read more and broaden their interests (Felker, 2014, pp. 21). When libraries apply gamification to their programs, they are finding ways to create engagement with patrons in interesting ways that are effective. The tools that they are employing are also beneficial because they are educating patrons in a manner that is impactful.

While gamification has its positive traits there are unfortunately some challenges when attempting to include gamification in the library system. For gamification to work the games need to be “fun”, if they fail to do so there will be lower user engagement and the learning aspect of the game would not be understood or reached because of this (Felker, 2014, pp. 21). There is also the aspect that poorly implemented gamification which could have damaging results to users when they participate in program that has those elements within it. This is because there is the possibility that when gamification is not well designed it could hurt the intrinsic motivation of those involved (Deci, Koestner, Ryan, 2001, pp. 84). Therefore, gamification would be hurting the user’s ability to want to engage and learn more with the library program. Another challenge that gamification in libraries face is privacy, a concern that is vital for all libraries. The way that most modern games function is that they tend to track the user’s data and information. This is certainly true of most computer and console-based games. The games work best by taking the users information, and thus get better at performing its tasks (Spina, 2014, pp. 67-68). If librarians chose to create a game, they should be vigilant of these privacy concerns.

Discussion

Libraries have been expanding their services with the implementation of gamification and ensuring their spot as a third space in society that can aptly advance their own development,

while also drawing in new patrons. The impact that this has had on libraries has been influential, and the effects it has had on current and future librarianship and libraries has been significant.

Below we will discuss this importance, and the way gamification has impacted libraries.

Importance of gamification in libraries

While the idea of gamification appears to relatively new, there are elements of it that can be seen in history. Gamification as we understand it now is, has existed in a somewhat different form in previous eras, but only because the types of games played were quite different.

Historically gamification, and its concepts application in libraries can be traced as far back as libraries in the 1800s in England. These libraries would offer gaming as a safe alternative to going to the public houses, where heavy drinking and other activities that were seen as a negative aspect of society. Thus, these libraries attempted to act as a healthy, and morale third space that people use. Now because of our modern technology, the concept of gamification has evolved but it is still a part of making libraries a third space. In our current times the gamification in libraries is seen as a way to attract underserved patrons and provide entertainment to the communities they are in (Ward, 2014, pp. 92). Therefore, libraries have used some form of gamification throughout their history and currently as a way to actively push being a third space while acting as a positive developmental force in the lives of their patrons.

There are libraries that host video game, and/or board game tournaments for younger patrons as a way to increase the use of the library. However, there are some that also provide Dungeons and Dragons events, and during such role-playing events it has been noted that library resources are used as a part of game play. Patrons will use the library to look up information that is quest specific (Robson, Nicholson, McPeck, 2014). Thus, patrons are learning and improving their own skills when engaged in gaming at the library. The ability for libraries to act as an

interactive learning space shows that, “Academic libraries can use the move towards gamification in higher education as a way to promote their collections and further engage and motivate students to learn more about library resources and services.” (Kim, 2013, para 4). The learning aspect that draws in new and familiar patrons to the library is what makes gamification important to libraries.

Effects of gamification in libraries currently

As it currently stands gamification in libraries has the ability to increase patronage, engage, and be a helpful part of patron’s life. But the effects that it has on libraries is that it ensures that libraries maintain and focus on having programming, “... with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole” (Eberhart, 2010, p.1). Gamification gives libraries the tools to continue to stimulate learning amongst its patrons, and when employed correctly, there is the understanding that “...the process of game-thinking and game mechanics [can] engage users and solve problems” (Cunningham, Zichermann, 2011) which can lead to positive outcomes. This is currently happening in school libraries where the library acts as one of the many tools that students have that can increase their development. However how they engage with the library, and the way in which the library can reach out them is how those students will be able to increase their skills. O’Neill Middle School has a program known as “Conquest of the Realm”, this is a library literacy program that has been enhanced by gamification. By creating a highly interactive and motivational game, about 80% of the students participated, gained and developed new literacy skills. They continued to engage with the library and reading long after the game ended (Squires, 2016). Libraries are increasing engagement, and entertainment in programming, along with increasing their resources and services as well. Therefore, in then

gamification is “...extracting those game mechanisms and appl[ing] them to reality in order to make the real-world experience more interesting and engaging” (Kim, 2012, para 4). This how gamification is directly affecting libraries, the gaming elements have allowed libraries to get better at being a service that can improve the lives of its patrons by finding more interactive ways to help them advance and grow. Gamification is acting as a tool to keep libraries relevant and up to date and has shown that is able to actually impact those that engage with it when it is done well within libraries.

Future effects of gamification in libraries

The effects of current gamification in libraries is that they have the ability to keep aiding their patrons in the development of their skills along with increasing the usage and engagement with the library. In the future and when looking globally, gamification will be affecting libraries by being even better at developing skills and engagement because current gamification relies on the advancement of gaming technology. Therefore, as the technology becomes more interactive, then gamification can be updated and transformed to be even more effective within libraries. This means that it can have even greater far reaching effects than the standard methods of fostering learning and development.

As the way in which gamification advances, mainly through video game and entertainment technology these improvements and aspects can be used by libraries to make even better programing. This means that, “(g)amification in libraries can play both an educational and a semi-business role.” (Kim, 2015, para 5). Currently some of these features are being implemented, but they will only be more relevant and will improve as technology advances. On the educational side one of these advances is alternate reality games, or ARG. An ARG is “...an interactive experience that uses the real world as a platform to tell a story that may be affected by

participants' ideas or actions” (Alternate reality games, 2011, para 1). The use of ARG’s in libraries is just an example of gamification advancing and getting better as technology advances. Universities like Penn State have used ARG’s to further engage their user base. They applied the ARG of Humans vs Zombies, in which a compelling story mode and game interaction allowed the university library to target new patrons. Because of the level of engagement, interest, and interesting topic the library was able to reach their set goal of increasing new patronage by 20% (Battles, 2014). What this shows is that ARG’s have the ability to be powerful tools to help libraries expand their engagement and service abilities.

ARG is one aspect of gamification that in the present is already showing to be a promising tool for library programming. When speculating on the future the effect of gamification in libraries ARG is a good example of how improving technology will benefit it and using virtual reality gaming is one way of showing this improvement. As the technology behind virtual reality is getting better and, “....as more businesses look to tap the technology, this will drive enterprise VR hardware and software revenue to jump 587% to \$5.5 billion in 2023, up from an estimated \$800 million in 2018...” (Sarnoff, 2018, para 2). Since there is investment into this kind of gaming, it can mean that it will improve virtual reality gaming as a whole. This ties into ARG because elements of virtual reality, are already at play when doing an alternate reality game. It could be surmised that parts virtual gaming could be fused with alternate reality gaming. Which in turn could mean an improved ARG experience that deepens the interest, and engagement with patrons which could certainly tie into increased patronage overall.

When looking at the way in which gamification is affecting libraries globally and from the future perspective it would be important to highlight the way in which gamification is being used by the Aarhus Public Library DOKK in Denmark. There they have a program called

“International Breakfast” and it is a program that encourages foreign families to eat breakfast with newcomers in the library as a way of building community and having new positive experience. The gaming element consisted of a competition of knowledge, and where families are broken into teams to compete for points. By working together, they gained more knowledge and had positive interactions with others (Holmquist, 2016). The knowledge-based challenges given to the teams meant that gamification allowed for a deep learning experience but provided a more beneficial and far reaching effect of community building and of immigrant acceptance. This is what gamification will be providing in the future both locally and globally. The Aarhus Public Library program was created not just to engage new patrons but to act as a bridge for the community it services. Generally, we see gamification a fun learning tool, that can bring patrons back. But Aarhus has seen its potential for more than that. The future of gamification will not simply be used as a tool to just act as a more fun way to learn about library programs or to get more people to come to the library. Gamification in the future will affect libraries by deepening patrons’ developmental abilities, connections they have with their communities, and library engagement.

Conclusion

Gamification in libraries has meant that libraries have been able to expand their services, act as third space in people's lives, and help them improve and develop their own skills. This aspect of gaming has allowed libraries to create games that can interact and engage with patrons to teach them information literacy or any other kind of skills and really improve the community that they are in. But like all tools there can be some challenges, in this case privacy concerns, and the ability to even hinder development if gamification is done incorrectly. Even with those elements’ gamification is important to libraries because of the fact that it does help with being an

excellent educational tool that draws in patrons to the library as well expanding the libraries ability to offer new kinds of programming. The current effects of gamification in libraries is that it is pushing libraries to be even better at being service to help people grow in their lives. In the future and around the world gamification will only advance so as to continue being a specialized tool that libraries can employ so as to stay relevant to the interest of the public and to help the communities it is in by engaging with them on a deeper level.

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